



GAMES FAQ

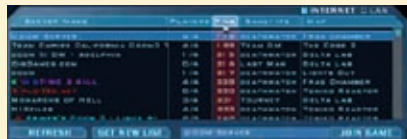
Q I want to play games online, but I have found some games quite jerky even though I'm playing over broadband. There's something called a 'ping' when I try and connect, which I've been told has to do with the game speed. What is it exactly?

A A ping, which is sometimes called the latency, is the time it takes for your computer to send a single data packet across the internet to the server and receive a reply. The quicker the ping, the lower the number, the lower the latency of your connection.

To play online games, you need a low-latency connection, because your computer will be exchanging lots of small bits of information with the server, including your current position and weapon as well as the locations of the other players.

When you're trying to play an online game, look at the ping time of the various servers and connect to the one that has the lowest score. In general, though, a ping of 150 or lower should be playable.

david@computershopper.co.uk



▲ Try and find a server with a low ping time to get the smoothest internet play

REVIEW REAL-TIME STRATEGY GAME

ELECTRONIC ARTS Black & White 2

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £20 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.cd-wow.com

DETAILS www.eagames.com



It's a fun proposition to have the fate of an entire civilisation in your hands, and Black & White 2 provides the opportunity to do just that. A massive improvement over the original game, this sequel gives you the same flexible control and throws in a more structured storyline.

The concept of the game remains the same: you play God. Your powers allow you to use your citizens like pawns, moving them around the land and making them collect resources, construct buildings or train to be soldiers. You can either nurture them or sacrifice them at your altar to build more power – the choice is yours.

Your villagers act like real people, so you must try to keep them happy or you'll lose population and ultimately power. To boost your standing, you need to increase your population either by attracting local settlements to join yours or the good old-fashioned procreation way, by turning villagers into breeders. However, too many breeders will mean that you run out of food and have too high a population. The control system can be a bit finicky, too. Rather than convert a breeder into a farmer, on numerous actions we accidentally sent a poor citizen tumbling through the air to their death.

As well as people, you also have a creature to do your bidding. We picked a giant lion. This creature can do all the same tasks as people, but is quicker and more powerful. It starts off quite dumb, so you have to train it. You have the choice of making it good or evil, depending on the way you want to play the game. However, if you make it evil



Pit giant animal against giant animal in large-scale combat

it's likely to start eating villagers when it gets hungry. Treat it right and upgrade its abilities, and your creature will become a powerful ally to help you out or even crush your enemy's troops.

Each map is there to be conquered, and there are two ways you can do this: defeat everybody else using warfare, or build a more impressive city and make everyone worship you. This gives plenty of scope, and means Black & White will appeal to those interested in building cities as well as those interested in sacking them. Along the way there are scrolls to click on, which give you tips, tutorials and missions. They're worth using, as the missions in particular give you extra tribute points that you can use to develop your society.

This game will take hours of gameplay to learn and longer to master. Provided you have the time, though, the detailed graphics and varied gameplay make it one of the best god sims on the market.

David Ludlow



Varied gameplay; excellent graphics; hours of fun



Control system can be difficult to use

REQUIREMENTS Windows 2000/XP, 1.66GHz processor, 512MB RAM, 3.5GB disk space. **Product code** EAR07704900IS

HOTLIST STRATEGY GAME

Civilization IV

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £18 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.play.com

DETAILS www.2kgames.com



Civilization IV shows us that there's life left in the god game genre. Using its turn-based play, you have time to think out detailed strategies before launching into an attack.

With plenty of building and town planning thrown in for good measure, this is an enthralling game that will keep you occupied for months.

REQUIREMENTS Windows 2000/XP, 1.2GHz processor, 64MB RAM, 1.7GB disk space. **Product code** B0009XH4CK



HOTLIST SIM AND BATTLE GAME

Stronghold 2

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £18 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.play.com

DETAILS www.stronghold2.com



The sequel to 2001's sleeper hit, Stronghold 2 takes all the castle-building fun of the first game and makes it even better. This time round, you can choose to play the sim game, where you must keep your citizens happy, or the war game, where you battle against the computer for control of the map. There's loads of gameplay in this innovative game, which should keep you busy for hours at a time.

REQUIREMENTS Windows 98 or later, 1.4GHz Pentium 4, 256MB RAM, 32MB graphics card, 2.5GB disk space. **Product code** B0007GIX0W



HOTLIST FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER

F.E.A.R.

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £27 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.specialreserve.co.uk

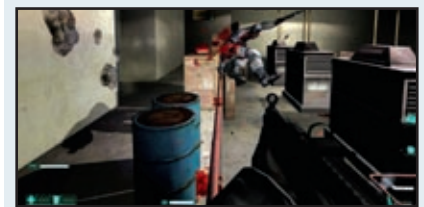
DETAILS www.whatisfear.com



An eclectic mix of styles, F.E.A.R. is one of the best and most frightening first-person shooters available. The graphics are stunning, with lifelike shadows and walls exploding with bullet impacts.

The horror theme starts to run out of pace during the final levels, but the rest of the game is so good you won't care.

REQUIREMENTS Windows 2000/XP, 1.7GHz Pentium 4 processor, 512MB RAM, 5GB disk space. **Product code** B00080FCY6





REVIEW FOOTBALL GAME

ELECTRONIC ARTS
FIFA 06

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £27 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.gameseek.co.ukDETAILS www.easports.com

Every year sees a new version of Electronic Arts' FIFA series of games. The latest version, 06, takes place in the current football season. It features all the teams and players from leagues around the world, as well as international teams. There is commentary by John Motson and Andy Gray, so it's almost like watching a game on TV.

As with previous games, there's a choice of gaming modes including tournaments, leagues and quick one-off matches where you can pit any two teams against each other. You can have one player per controller on your PC, or play multiplayer games via the internet or a local network.

The basic controls are easy enough to learn, but you'll have to learn the more advanced controls if you're to master the game. These include deciding on team tactics through the game and a range of more complicated moves, such as dummies. The shoot key has been refined so you must build up the power bar until it's between two limits. Get it above or below, and you'll shoot wide. It's tough to master, as the bar shoots up quickly, but it's worth it.

It takes a while to get used to the finer points of control, and until you do the other side will run rings around you even if they're Carlisle and you're Barcelona. It can be frustrating at times. If you accidentally hit pass twice, the player up front passes the ball forwards even if there's no one there.

A management game is included, but there are more detailed titles available for this; FIFA is best suited to traditional football matches. The character models are detailed and even look like the players. However, we had to download the latest patch on our test PC as the game was jerky at first.

If you have last year's version, there's not much reason to upgrade unless you want the latest team names. However, newcomers will enjoy it.

David Ludlow

✓ Official FA licence; current season

✗ Difficult to master controls; we had to download a patch to get it working

REQUIREMENTS Windows XP/2000, 1.3GHz processor, 256MB RAM, 1.2GB disk space. **Product code** RAR07704784IS



Match point: turn fantasy into reality by getting your team to win games they never would in real life

REVIEW STEALTH GAME

REBELLION
Sniper Elite

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £16 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.dvd.co.ukDETAILS www.rebellion.co.uk

A lot of games make using a sniper rifle as easy as putting it to your eye and pulling the trigger. In reality, it's a lot more complex; sniping involves adjusting the shot for wind, distance and movement. Throw in the camouflage and sneaking required to achieve a good shot, and it sounds like the basis of a stealth game.

Sniper Elite does exactly that, placing you as an American soldier disguised as a German who must prevent Stalin's troops getting hold of Germany's nuclear secrets. The plot doesn't really matter as much as the action. Set primarily in half-destroyed cities, you have to complete various lone missions. Stealth is the name of the game, as getting around the map unnoticed improves your chances of killing the enemy. At first it's hard to get used to, particularly if you're used to first-person shooters. After a while, though, you'll become engrossed in the action.

Controls consist of three postures: stand, crouch and crawl. You can control the speed of movement in each position by using the scroll wheel. Using a combination of all three movements and speeds, you must sneak through the levels to find good sniping positions. Sniping is done through the usual crosshair view. But you also need to take into account gravity for the bullet drop, wind and your heart beat. You can even empty your lungs to steady yourself further.

This game isn't for the impatient. Much of the time you'll be crawling into a suitable sniping position, so it's slow. You can collect machine guns on the way, but the action is stilted and it's not as much fun as your traditional shooter in this respect. So stick to your main weapon, prepare to spend time on each map, and the in-depth gameplay will suck you in.

David Ludlow

✓ In-depth sniping; detailed graphics

✗ Can be a bit slow; other weapons aren't very well implemented

REQUIREMENTS Windows 98 or later, 256MB RAM, 1GHz processor, 4GB disk space. **Product code** 74799102



Not even those effeminate-looking soldiers will be safe from the rifle in Sniper Elite

REVIEW FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER

UBISOFT
Brothers in Arms:
Earned in Blood

RATING ★★★

PRICE £30 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.tesco.comDETAILS www.ubi.com

Like the original Brothers in Arms game, Earned in Blood puts you in charge of a squad of men. By using the right mouse button you can command them to move, lay down covering fire and storm enemy positions. Don't try to ditch your squad, though, as you'll need their help to progress.

What was a good idea originally hasn't been developed for the sequel. Earned In Blood feels like more of the same. The graphics, while competent, look a little out of date when compared with the latest titles such as F.E.A.R in our Hotlist (left).

The squad commands and artificial intelligence could have done with an overhaul. For example, if you make your way to a forward position and call your squad to follow, they'll take the most direct route to you. They'll do that if it's through enemy gunfire or emplacements, rather than manoeuvring carefully, taking cover on the way. It can also be hard to get them to lay down covering fire; they'll often complain that they can't do it from where they are. Instead, you have to move them to a suitable position. Once you get used to the game's idiosyncrasies, though, you can move and flank enemy troops successfully.

More annoying is the fact that the levels feel formulaic. The missions tend to be of the 'find a machine gun post and destroy it' type, which means the same tactics can be used time and time again.

After seeing the brilliance of F.E.A.R and how engrossing Call of Duty 2 looks, we wished the developers had ditched the squad action and given us a game with a wider range of missions. That said, there's still a lot to enjoy. If you loved the first game, the follow-up gives you more of the same.

David Ludlow

✓ Team action brings a different slant to first-person shooters

✗ Difficult to control your squad; repetitive missions

REQUIREMENTS Windows 2000/XP, 1GHz Pentium III processor, 512MB RAM, 5GB disk space. **Product code** 0814215



In Brothers in Arms: Earned in Blood you can control your squad, but it's often easier to do the dirty work yourself